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## Third Committee

**Summary record of the 3rd meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 6 October 2009, at 10 a.m.

*Chairman:* Mr. Penke ..... (Latvia)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.07 a.m.*

**Agenda item 61: Social development** (*continued*) (A/64/65 and A/64/180)

**(a) Implementation of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly** (*continued*) (A/64/157, A/64/158 and A/64/158/Corr.1)

**(b) Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family** (*continued*) (A/64/61-E/2009/3, A/64/132, A/64/132/Corr.1 and A/64/134)

**(c) Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing** (*continued*) (A/64/127)

1. **Mr. Duarte** (Portugal), speaking on behalf of Portuguese youth, said that Portugal had done much to help young people adapt to changes in the social, economic and cultural environment, encouraging young workers and students to go abroad to pursue their recreational activities, their studies or their career, supporting young entrepreneurs, and promoting information and communication technologies to create a knowledge society without exclusion. Its youth policies and programmes were based on the principles of action set forth in the Lisbon strategy, and there were two public agencies responsible for monitoring them. However, with the current crisis Portuguese youth were finding their entry into adult life complicated by the problem of finding skilled employment, decent working conditions and affordable housing. On the education front, the Government needed not only to combat failure and dropout rates but also to reform the higher education system in order to promote equality of opportunities. Young Portuguese were already able to participate in local decision-making through local youth councils, but they were insisting on the creation of regional councils where they could engage in dialogue with regional, national and international decision makers.

2. The young people of Portugal believed that policies and programmes targeted at them must be pursued with the involvement of youth organizations, local communities, schools, sporting clubs, authorities at all levels, and all other stakeholders. They were asking the United Nations and its Member States to commit themselves, on behalf of youth, by implementing a worldwide cross-sectoral policy for improving the situation of youth and reinforcing their role in society.

3. **Mrs. Büning** (Germany), speaking on behalf of German youth, said the four subjects of greatest concern to them were climate change, education, effective participation, and the rights of youth around the world. Young people were acutely aware of the fallout from climate change, which in the end was man-made, and they were standing shoulder to shoulder with young people around the world in the campaign to combat climate change. However, their commitment would be meaningless unless Governments assumed their responsibilities by reaching a climate agreement at the Copenhagen Summit, one that would involve young people in combating climate change and would require ecological education in school and extracurricular activities.

4. Young Germans recognized that, like the learning imparted in school, extracurricular education (which was generally provided by independent or charitable associations) helped young people to forge an identity and to become responsible members of society. They were therefore calling on Governments and other stakeholders to support volunteer associations and in this way revive young people's commitment to volunteer work.

5. **Mr. Mohrs** (Germany), also speaking on behalf of German youth, said that young people were in the best position to know what was needed to improve their situation, and that they should be given a greater role in decision-making at the local, national and international levels and should be included in delegations representing their countries to international bodies. Considering the prime importance of participating in elections, the principal tool of democracy, German youth were demanding that the voting age be reduced to 15 years, that the right to vote and the right to stand for election be tied to residency and not to nationality, and that all young people be duly informed on this point by the independent media.

6. Fully aware of the problems involved in the transition from childhood to adulthood, German youth were calling for adoption of a worldwide convention on the rights of youth that would give them the chance to achieve their full potential, protect their rights and guarantee their autonomy, their health, their rights to decent employment and education, and their right to housing. They were demanding an ambitious programme to achieve all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and insisting that all stakeholders

assume their responsibilities in accordance with the principles of good governance and viability.

7. **Mrs. Wallberg** (Sweden), speaking on behalf of Swedish youth, said that sustainable development for all, which presupposed the possibility of living in good health and participating in political decisions, must be guided by the spirit of solidarity and the desire to work for the common good. Swedish youth believed that the right to live one's sexuality was essential to health and well-being and went hand-in-hand with equality of the sexes, recognizing the need to be aware of the potential risks. Recognizing that it was not possible to participate fully in the life of society without being in good health and that participating in decision-making meant taking one's health in hand, Swedish youth were asking Governments to promote young people's participation by supporting the organizations representing them. Young people had solutions to propose, they were imbued with a spirit of enterprise and innovation, and they refused to live in a world that they had not helped build, consequently they were insisting on being associated in decision-making processes at all levels in order to shape their own future while helping to achieve human rights and sustainable development.

8. **Mr. Varney** (Australia), speaking on behalf of Australian youth, said that young people from across Australia had seen their lives completely disrupted by unprecedented disasters due to climate change, and they were living in fear that brush fires, heat waves, and flooding caused by high sea levels would become common events. Not content to confine their energies to local initiatives, Australian youth had launched a vast campaign of youth action for the climate, demanding that world leaders conclude an ambitious, fair and binding agreement that would call, in particular, for a reduction of at least 40 per cent in greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2020.

9. Like young people in many other countries, young Australians wanted to make a useful contribution to society. To do so they had to overcome many obstacles, joining in community initiatives to establish equality among all young people and to facilitate intercultural relations so that they could speak with a single voice. They had been helped in this respect by the Government, which had organized a forum for all young people, including those who were excluded and homeless, and this had given them the hope of playing an influential role in their community. They were calling on world leaders to take energetic action to combat climate change and to bequeath to future generations a world worthy of them.

10. **Mr. Shwaikh** (Iraq) said the Iraqi Government was determined to ensure equality of opportunities, to meet the needs of all, to overcome social inequalities, and to restore balance to the lives of Iraqi citizens, who were still suffering the fallout from wars and economic sanctions. Despite the country's resources, economic development was difficult because all of its infrastructure had been destroyed. The Iraqi Government was attempting however to improve living standards by reviving the economy, reducing poverty and creating jobs, while raising civil servants' salaries and improving social protection for non-working people (widows, orphans, the elderly and people with specific needs). It had created a support fund for the poor and a development assistance fund for isolated rural areas, and it had implemented programmes to improve families' living standards and help them adapt to social change. Measures had been taken to strengthen security and improve access to justice and legal aid. The Government was working to improve basic health, vaccination and mental health services, to expand health facilities by involving the private sector, to guarantee the distribution of medications, to improve research and to encourage Iraqi doctors who had taken refuge abroad to return home. To improve the quality of primary and secondary education, training was being provided for teachers and school facilities were being upgraded. Students and teachers were being introduced to leading-edge technologies and international research works. The scholarship budget for students to study abroad had been increased. Iraq hoped to make further progress on the social development front, something that was essential to restoring peace and security in the region, but it could only do this with the support of the international community.

11. **Mrs. Sodov** (Mongolia) noted that the current financial, food and oil crises, together with climate change, were cancelling out the progress made towards the MDGs because of their direct and lasting repercussions on people's lives and livelihoods. In this respect, cooperatives could contribute to economic and social development by fostering the spirit of enterprise, the creation of productive jobs, increased incomes, reduced poverty and greater social integration, social protection and community development. They allowed everyone to control his livelihood and to participate in economic and social development. When Mongolia had moved from a planned economy to a market economy,

its first cooperatives had become autonomous associations co-managed and democratically controlled by their members. The Mongolian Government had taken steps to create a sound legislative and regulatory framework and to establish conditions conducive to the emergence of new cooperatives. The country had a law on cooperatives and a law granting exemptions from customs duties and taxes for equipment and spare parts destined for small and medium-sized enterprises, including cooperatives. In its national programme for development of cooperatives over the period 2009-2017, the Government planned to create a favourable legal framework, provide economic and financial support and encourage investments, strengthen stakeholder participation, create a sales network and promote training. Thanks to such measures, the number of cooperatives had increased and some 50,000 jobs had been created in various sectors. The Mongolian delegation hoped to rally the necessary support for proclamation of the International Year of Cooperatives.

12. **Mr. Al-Shami** (Yemen) said that the financial, economic, energy and ecological crises of today posed a threat to economic and social development and that international cooperation must be stepped up to deal with them, especially in developing countries and the least developed countries. Yemen was itself faced with the combined effects of demographic growth, falling oil revenues and resource scarcity, while it was one of the smallest recipients of international assistance. He was therefore calling on international partners to increase their aid. The Yemeni Government had taken several measures in favour of youth, such as creation of the Ministry of Youth and establishment of a capacities development programme for the period 2006-2015. Internationally, Yemen was committed to implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth. When it came to persons with disabilities, Yemen had participated in drafting the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and was one of the first States to ratify it, as well as its optional protocol. Domestic application of the Convention and its optional protocol had produced laws on the rights of persons with disabilities, their access to training and their participation in the development process, and one law (No. 61 of 1991) had created a special fund for persons with disabilities. In addition, Yemen had hosted a number of meetings on this issue. The Government had also taken legislative measures in favour of older persons, and had built retirement homes. It was now working on formulation of a national strategy. Finally, Yemen was a party to efforts to apply the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

13. **Mr. Al Habib** (Islamic Republic of Iran), referring to the report of the Secretary-General on the 2009 world social situation (A/64/158), said the current world crises were jeopardizing the progress made to date, especially in developing countries. Under these circumstances, the Iranian Government was determined to respect the commitments given at Copenhagen during the World Summit for Social Development as well as the other internationally agreed targets, as evidenced by the domestic efforts Iran had made in the areas of health, employment and poverty reduction.

14. Citing the Secretary-General's report on follow-up to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family (A/64/134) and article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, he stressed the importance of the family for social integration. The Iranian delegation joined with the Secretary-General in inviting Governments to begin preparations for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, in 2014, and to take that occasion to promote the development of family policies. With respect to older persons, the Iranian Social Security Agency and the Ministry of Social Protection were responsible, along with other governmental and non-governmental bodies, for giving effect to the three priority guidelines contained in the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, with a view to respecting the rights of older persons, ensuring their economic security, and guaranteeing their access to health services. In addition, the Iranian Centre for Research on Ageing was working for a better understanding of the social and psychological needs of older persons.

15. **Mr. Bhattarai** (Nepal) stressed the importance of achieving in full the priority objectives of social development, and said that to combat poverty, inequalities and exclusion the employment market would have to be expanded and developed countries would need to take a more conciliatory stance regarding migrant workers from developing countries. The international community must also increase its financial and technical support to the least developed countries, in particular those in post-conflict situations, and it should work in a comprehensive and concerted way to resolve the current crises.

16. The Government of Nepal had taken various measures to promote social development, particularly in the context of its interim development plan, by

adopting a rights-based approach as called for in Nepal's interim constitution. On this point, he recalled that national efforts had to be supported by regional and international cooperation in order to promote the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. His Government was currently drawing up a national youth policy and was committed to giving young people a role in economic and social initiatives. It had set for itself as well the objective of eliminating illiteracy and making the education system more equitable and accessible to all. Finally, Nepal had adopted a policy and a plan of action for persons with disabilities, who now enjoyed new prospects for employment in the civil service.

17. **Mr. Gonzalez** (Mexico), representing Mexican youth, welcomed the Secretary-General's report on implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth (A/64/61-E/2009/3), and said Mexico had played an active part in the expert group meeting on youth issues organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in May 2008, which dealt with the objectives and targets in the annex to the Secretary-General's report. Mexico had also participated in the youth representatives programme for the last five years.

18. He said youth should be considered as active agents of social change and that if lasting progress were to be made towards development, and in particular toward achieving the MDGs, greater account would have to be taken of young people, without overlooking other priority sectors of society. Beyond the domestic initiatives it had taken, the Mexican Government had decided to invite all Member States, representatives of civil society and young people from around the world to take part in an international conference on youth, to be held in Mexico City from 24 to 27 August 2010. The objectives of that conference would be to set priorities and policies for youth and development, to promote creation of a special follow-up mechanism for youth questions within the United Nations, to foster dialogue between civil society organizations and Governments, and to share experiences, analyses, strategies and good practices.

19. **Mrs. Sow** (Senegal), citing the threats and obstacles facing the most vulnerable population segments in developing countries, such as extreme poverty, soaring oil and food prices, and the effects of climate change, said the question of development was first and foremost a political one, and was therefore the responsibility of political leaders. Developing countries must commit themselves to better governance and greater investment in health and education, while developed countries should lend their support by reducing the debt burden and helping institute a fairer international trading system. For its part, the Senegalese Government was determined to fulfil its commitments, with respect to women and youth in particular. As it had done in previous sessions, Senegal would be presenting a draft resolution on youth, together with the Republic of Moldova and Portugal, which it hoped would garner wide support.

20. On the domestic front, the Senegalese Government had adopted a development strategy comprising four essential levers: wealth creation, reinforcing capacities and basic social services, improving living conditions for vulnerable groups, and preparing a mechanism for decentralized and participatory monitoring. To combat HIV/AIDS, the prevalence of which was relatively stable but which affected twice as many women as men, Senegal had introduced a free screening and monitoring programme to ensure equitable access to care.

21. **Mr. Solcan** (Romania), representing Romanian youth, invited all Governments to follow the example of his country, which for four years now had been including youth representatives in its national delegation to the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and its technical commissions, whenever youth questions were being addressed. It was essential for young people to participate in the decision-making process so that they could become full members of world society.

22. Recalling that education made it possible to reduce poverty, gender inequality, health problems and unemployment, he said the international community had made encouraging progress towards basic education for all, and that the launch of the "Education for All: Class of 2015" initiative in 2008 was an important milestone in the campaign against illiteracy. Yet because of the economic crisis, more and more young people were being denied an elementary education, and efforts to secure access to basic education at an affordable cost must be redoubled. Non-formal education should also be further explored as a useful approach.

23. **Mrs. Sârbu** (Romania), also speaking on behalf of Romanian youth, said that young people were among the groups most severely affected by the grave financial and economic crisis currently gripping the world. In fact, young people accounted for 40 per cent of the 59 million newly unemployed counted by ILO

since 2007, and around 45 per cent of people who had fallen into poverty. While the trend was less alarming in Romania, the authorities were committed to several legislative bills to give young people real opportunities to find a decent and productive job and thereby to break the vicious circle of unemployment, poverty, and limited access to education and medical care.

24. Inspired by the ILO Decent Work Programme and its Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, the Global Jobs Pact demonstrated the determination of ILO and its members to come to grips with the crisis. Yet words had to be translated into actions. First, school programmes must be revised and broadened around the world. International standards should be set, wherever possible, so that young people could take advantage of job opportunities at home and abroad. Second, young people must be able to contribute to the drafting of labour legislation, using for example information and communication technologies, so that their interests would be given the same consideration as those of employers. Third, young entrepreneurs should receive basic financial support, so that society as a whole could reap the benefits of their creativity and their capacities for innovation.

25. **Mrs. Al-Zibdeh** (Jordan) reported that Jordan had adopted several programmes of social protection and welfare. One of the Government's priority themes was to reinforce the role of the family. In 2014, Jordan would be marking the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family to show its support for the work of the United Nations on this issue. It had established a National Council for the Family, which was to sponsor campaigns to improve cohesion among family members and initiatives such as the National Strategic Plan for the Protection of the Family and the Prevention of Violence (2005-2009). The Council was also pursuing policies to meet the essential needs of the family and to enhance its role in society, relying for this purpose on partnership between the formal sector and the private sector as well as cooperation with civil society organizations.

26. Jordan considered that the MDGs did not take proper account of persons with disabilities. To protect their rights, Jordan introduced a national strategy 2007-2009 and established the Supreme Council for Persons with Disabilities, which would be holding its first session in November 2009. With respect to youth, this was a very important population group whose rights must be protected. Young people were penalized by many problems — unemployment, poverty, illness, drug addiction, delinquency, accidents, conflicts — to which must be added the specific challenges facing girls, and in particular the need to include them more effectively in decision-making. The 2007-2009 strategy of the Supreme Council for Youth sought to strengthen young people's participation and promote respect for their civil and political rights, while giving them responsibilities. In the case of older persons, a strategy had been instituted to integrate this population group into all aspects of economic, social and human life. All these social development policy measures were being implemented with full respect for the principles of non-exclusion and non-discrimination.

27. **Mr. Naef** (Switzerland), speaking on behalf of Swiss youth, noted that young people, who represented some 70 per cent of the world population, carried within them future solutions to the world's problems. At a time of crisis, vulnerable groups — including youth — were threatened with social exclusion, the many and harmful effects of which were described in the Secretary-General's report (A/64/157). The situation called for instruments of social inclusion to ease the impact of the crisis. For Switzerland, these instruments were, on one hand, reinforced training and job creation and, on the other hand, the establishment of social security systems. Those systems played an essential role in times of crisis, even if they presented additional risks in terms of financing. Deploring the fact that the international community had not examined or even recognized the enormous potential of a social security system for developing countries and the least developed countries, he said the international community should unite its efforts to establish, within a reasonable time, a minimum world social security that would guarantee universal coverage suited to the needs of each country. The commitment to coordination given by ILO and the United Nations Chief Executives Board should be welcomed. There should be no discrimination when it came to the social inclusion of young people. In his report (A/64/157), the Secretary-General had cited young people of immigrant stock as a particularly vulnerable group. Switzerland therefore proposed that the 2011 report of the Secretary-General on this question should be devoted to the issue of migration.

28. **Mr. Rahman** (Bangladesh) considered that older persons should play a more active role in society and should have a less degrading image. The ageing of the population, while it testified to achievements in the

area of social development, particularly longer life expectancy, was also becoming a major concern. There were now 737 million older persons in the world: in Bangladesh they would number 18 million by 2025, compared to 6 million in 1991. The great majority of this steadily increasing population were living below the poverty line, and this threatened to become a social problem, aggravated by the current economic, financial and climatic crisis. For this reason Bangladesh was committed to implementing the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, a task that fell primarily to national Governments but that also required international cooperation. Recognizing the link between ageing and poverty, Bangladesh was focusing its efforts under the Madrid plan of action on eliminating poverty: more than half of the national budget was earmarked for poverty reduction programmes, with a view to reducing the rate from 45 per cent to 15 per cent by 2021. The Government had recently raised the rates for retirement pensions and their coverage: 2.2 million people were now drawing pensions. It had also forged a partnership with NGOs and civil society organizations and was working to promulgate a law guaranteeing the rights of older persons. The international community had the duty of striving to remedy the gaps in this area, in particular by mobilizing adequate resources for full and complete implementation of national programmes for the elderly. It was essential, then, for developed countries to fulfil their official development assistance commitment, as reaffirmed in the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the decade 2001 to 2010, which was to devote 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to developing countries and 0.2 per cent to the least developed, by 2010.

29. **Mrs. Popova** (Bulgaria), speaking on behalf of Bulgarian youth, said the most important thing was to promote youth participation in decision-making at all levels, which would require including young people in all the committees and organs of the United Nations with social development responsibilities. Youth NGOs should also be included among the organizations accredited to the United Nations. In addition, United Nations youth associations should be made more effective through cooperation with the United Nations World Forum of Youth and the sponsoring of worldwide events such as an international youth day. In terms of encouraging cooperation with the United Nations, the most important step would be to finance activities under the World Programme of Action for Youth. Budgets should be allocated to the national offices of UNDP, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other institutions dealing with youth. Those funds should be granted not only to large, experienced NGOs but also to informal groups that were working closely with young people in developing countries, so they could make their voice heard. One might even consider instituting a permanent United Nations advisory body on youth.

30. **Mr. Puri** (India) said that, 15 years after the World Summit for Social Development, there was still much to be done. The past year had been particularly difficult for developing countries because of the economic and financial crisis. That crisis, which was not the doing of developing countries, was hampering their economic growth and compromising the progress they had been slowly achieving. Consequently it would seem imperative to pursue and even step up efforts at assistance, especially financial assistance, for developing countries. The United Nations Secretary-General himself had pointed to the direct link between funding availability and progress in achieving the MDGs.

31. He was pleased at the reference in the Secretary-General's report (A/64/158) to India as one of the rare social development success cases and said that inclusive growth was the principal theme of the eleventh national five-year plan for 2007-2012. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), adopted in 2006, guaranteed 100 days of work per year for adults, together with a compulsory minimum wage. That mechanism, which had been of particular benefit to women and other marginalized groups, had given work to 45 million people in the last year through rural development programmes. It was being implemented jointly with another initiative, the "Bhirat Nirman" programme for constructing rural infrastructure. A further national programme had been instituted to improve housing conditions for slum dwellers. On the education front, India had promulgated a law guaranteeing the right to education to age 14, and was giving particular attention to children with disabilities. It had also launched a literacy campaign for women, with the target of reducing the female illiteracy rate by half in three years.

32. **Mrs. Mangesho** (United Republic of Tanzania) said the implementation of the Copenhagen Programme of Action for Social Development was vital for achieving internationally agreed development objectives, including the MDGs. In this context,

Tanzania had adopted a national strategy to reduce poverty and promote growth. It had recorded solid results in this area, but the global financial, food and energy crisis and the effects of climate change were jeopardizing these accomplishments. It was imperative, then, to review policy options. The creation of decent jobs for young people, who represented 68 per cent of the national work force, was one of the Government's priorities. Several measures had been taken on this score, including adoption of a national action plan for youth employment. Steps had been taken to improve key programmes, including measures to strengthen the youth development fund, the preparation of training manuals to foster the entrepreneurial spirit, and the development of financial management projects. Finally, she recalled the proposal that Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, had put to the General Assembly to proclaim a decade of youth employment in Africa.

33. Recognizing that the majority of the population lived in rural areas and that agriculture was therefore the main economic activity, the Tanzanian Government was working to modernize the sector to make it more productive and was appealing to the international community to encourage partnerships between the public and private sectors. In these efforts, it was important not to overlook the challenges facing older persons. The ageing of the world population was a universal concern. She welcomed the expert group meeting on the rights of older persons, held in Bonn in May 2009, and asked that the recommendations from that meeting be widely distributed among Member States and organizations concerned with the elderly. The Tanzanian Government supported the expert group's recommendation to appoint a special rapporteur on the rights of older persons. Persons with disabilities also deserved increased attention, yet they were invisible in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the MDGs. The Tanzanian Government would be submitting a resolution to include these persons in the MDGs.

34. Cooperatives were important factors for making communities economically independent, especially rural ones. The history of the cooperative movement in Tanzania dated back to independence. The Government was pursuing a clear policy in this field, striving to create a supportive environment through the establishment of federations of farm cooperatives and savings-and-loan societies. Tanzania was committed to implementing the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action on Social Development.

35. **Mrs. Mballa Evenga** (Cameroon), assessing the world social situation in 2009, pointed to increasing setbacks in progress towards the 2015 objective of halving extreme poverty, which afflicted developing countries in particular. In sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty had more than doubled since 1981. Moreover, the world financial and economic crises, the volatility of food and energy prices, as well as climate change were jeopardizing the progress achieved to date, undermining all prospects for social development. In this context, it was essential to increase official development assistance, as had been agreed internationally. Despite these problems, developing countries had devoted efforts to making social development a reality, especially through strategies and policies to promote social advancement for the most vulnerable groups and to create jobs.

36. Cameroon had made poverty reduction a national priority and the various plans and programmes adopted internationally offered a road map for the Cameroonian Government's efforts. Convinced that social integration and cohesion could be assured only by reducing inequalities and promoting access to basic social services, education and health for all, and particularly young people, persons with disabilities and older persons, the country had adopted a national youth policy and launched a vast recruitment programme in the civil service. These measures were intended to reduce youth unemployment rates, caused mainly by the past restructuring of public and para-public enterprises and the freeze on hiring in the civil service, which had affected nearly 17 per cent of the workforce (32 per cent in urban areas and 9 per cent of the countryside). In order to make equality of opportunities a reality for persons with disabilities and to guarantee their special rights, Cameroon had adopted legislation making access for these persons to health care, vocational training and employment an obligation of national solidarity. It had signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol in October 2008. With respect to the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, older persons had a central place in Cameroon and were involved in all important decisions. She recalled that on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Madrid Plan, Cameroon had asked for creation of a fund to finance projects and programmes to tap the potential of older persons.

37. **Mr. Giorgio** (Eritrea) said that, in light of the socio-economic impacts that these crises were having on most developing countries and poor people, stakeholders must take urgent and consistent measures to eliminate the underlying problems that continued to prevent these countries from developing. National Governments should be left free to prepare initiatives and strategies suited to their situation and specific priorities.

38. Eritrea was striving to achieve the objectives of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development and the MDGs by instituting a more equitable society that would be attentive to the problems of women, young people, the family, older people and persons with disabilities in all regions, especially in rural areas that for many decades had been denied the most elementary services. After years of conflict, the country was now engaged in relief programmes, reconstruction and construction of economic, social and physical infrastructure and had mobilized its limited human, material and financial resources to these ends. Measures such as modernizing primary and secondary schools, extending the power grid to small towns and rural areas, and reinforcing access to basic social services had already served to lengthen life expectancy and reduce infant and child mortality rates, morbidity and mortality rates from malaria, maternal mortality rates, and the number of persons living with HIV/AIDS. Mobilization of domestic manpower, in particular young people, in the context of a national development programme had played a key role in building the infrastructure on which Eritrea had based its economic and social development at the cost of immense human and financial sacrifices. The situation of persons with disabilities was systematically taken into account in the country's development programme. One of Eritrea's goals was to achieve effective participation for persons with disabilities in all spheres of social life, by improving their physical and psychological situation, their level of education and their image in society. Measures and programmes had been instituted to give these people full access to services tailored to their specific needs.

39. The international community must move beyond declarations of intent and make a reality of the objectives it had set. Coordination and cooperation at all levels would play an important role in this respect.

40. **Mrs. Kidanu** (Ethiopia), stressing the importance of the principles proclaimed at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development and in the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, said that the Ethiopian Constitution enshrined access for all Ethiopians to social security, to the extent domestic resources would allow. She cited the many agencies and laws intended to protect the social and economic rights of workers in the public and private sectors, noting that because of limited resources some provisions, such as unemployment benefits and family allowances, were not always delivered. Ethiopia considered it a universal obligation to provide social protection for disadvantaged groups such as unemployed youth, children, poor women, the elderly and persons with disabilities. It was striving unremittingly to give its people the means to become independent and to improve their living conditions in an environment consistent with equal opportunities for men and women of all generations and in all regions of the country. The successive poverty reduction programmes adopted by the Ethiopian Government bore witness to its determination to achieve the MDGs.

41. Ethiopia's was primarily an agrarian society, and rural livelihoods were dependent on small farms. Aware of the role of agriculture in creating jobs, assuring food security and improving living conditions for rural people, the Government had prepared policies and adopted strategies and programmes to speed development in this sector. These measures had contributed to the overall growth of the Ethiopian economy, which had achieved between 10 per cent and 12 per cent in each of the last five years. The Ethiopian Government had also reinforced its policies for promoting employment in urban areas. It had encouraged the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises by facilitating access to credit and offering short-term training and advisory services, together with a national programme to create housing. In the previous fiscal year, nearly 4,300 microenterprises and small businesses had been created in 55 towns. Housing programmes had met needs in this area while creating more than 16,000 urban jobs.

42. Ethiopia had also taken a number of steps to implement the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, including a national action plan for older persons. It had also decided to apply the programme for decent work and to continue promoting social development and insertion for all population groups; to do this, however, it must be able to count on cooperation from developed countries.

43. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that the drastic financial and economic crises, the volatility of

food and energy prices and the effects of climate change were all the result of a capitalist system that threatened the very existence of humanity. The Government of reconciliation and national unity of the Republic of Nicaragua was giving priority to eliminating poverty and implementing economic and social development programmes that addressed the needs of the most disadvantaged classes. It had created instruments to guarantee participation by the poorest people in preparing public policies, and to give them access to services. Health care and education were free. According to the World Health Organization, Nicaragua had exceeded the MDG for halving the incidence and prevalence of tuberculosis and the mortality rate associated with this disease by 2015. Moreover, the maternal mortality rate had dropped from 90 per 100,000 live births in 2006 to 64 in 2008. In the field of education, Nicaragua had been declared a country free of illiteracy.

44. Nicaragua had adopted a law on food and nutritional security and autonomy and its special programme for food security been hailed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. It had also adopted a number of measures to improve the status of women, in particular a programme of food production bonuses, the main beneficiaries of which were rural women. In agriculture, it had improved the delivery of services, such as the dissemination of environmentally friendly farming methods among indigenous peoples and communities of African origin.

45. Nicaragua welcomed the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas initiative, which was based on solidarity, unity and complementarity in addressing current difficulties. He asked developed countries not to use the effects of the crisis, which they themselves had provoked, as a pretext for failing to fulfil their commitments to official development assistance.

46. **Mr. Ja'afari** (Syrian Arab Republic) stressed his country's commitment to the objectives established at the World Summit for Social Development. Syria was examining and assessing the progress made and the obstacles encountered in achieving social development for all. In light of the world crises, foreign occupation, over-exploitation of resources, the aggravation of wars of aggression and grave and inhumane violations of international law, States were facing severe difficulties that could nullify all the progress achieved in the area of social development and the efforts under way to establish stable, safe and just societies in which citizens could live in dignity. If people living under occupation were to achieve the objectives of the Copenhagen World Summit and the MDGs, among others, they would need to accede to independence and to exercise their right to self-determination.

47. Syria was pursuing a just economic and social policy that sought to distribute income fairly and involve the poor in designing measures to improve their situation. Young people were encouraged to build their own future and to participate in decisions concerning them, especially with respect to employment. Syria had signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol in 2009.

48. Syria had examined all the reports of the Secretary-General on social development, and regretted that they were silent on the disastrous consequences of Israel's occupation of Arab territories in Palestine, in the Syrian Golan and in Lebanon. Syria was also disappointed that the Commission on Sustainable Development had not addressed the question of the disabilities resulting from the use on Syrian territory of weapons that could have long-term repercussions such as cluster bombs and antipersonnel mines.

49. **Mrs. Kavun** (Ukraine) said that in 2009 the Ukrainian Government was striving to forestall a drop in living standards and to prepare and apply measures to minimize the fallout from the financial and economic crisis. Government credit to the financial sector had risen steadily from January to June, and funds earmarked for social development were up by 2.1 per cent over 2008. The minimum wage had been raised by 3.3 per cent on 1 April 1991. The rules governing social assistance benefits had been changed to accommodate the unemployed. Average nominal wages had increased by 6.1 per cent over 2008, and the average pension by 10.7 per cent. To combat unemployment and deal with seasonal work problems, the Ukrainian Government had taken a number of steps that had created some 295,000 jobs and had cut unemployment by 0.2 per cent to June 2009. It has also amended social insurance legislation and had prepared draft laws on the protection of pregnant women and mothers. In addition, it had boosted social services for vulnerable people, in particular those with disabilities, orphans and children hospitalized in public long-term care facilities.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*